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THE EFFECTS OF A HIGH FAMILY INVOLVEMENT IN PUPILS' EDUCATION

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Abstract

This study aims to investigate the impact of a high level of family involvement in the students' education in the beginning of the primary school cycle of the Romanian educational system. During our research, we have assessed the level of involvement of the families in pupils' education and the degree of development of the different types of the student's intelligence. The questionnaires were filled during the school year 2016-2017 by 227 parents or legal tutors of students from Cluj County, Romania. We were interested in the answer to the following question: "Is there a connection between the level of family involvement in the students' education and the degree of development of all eight types of intelligence discovered by Howard Gardner?". It is generally accepted that the family, school and community are the most important factors which influence the students' development. Recent studies have established that the main influencing factors of the quality of family involvement in the child's education are the following: the socio-economic status, the educational level of the parents, and the number of family members. We have discovered that a high level of family involvement in their education has a significant influence on the degree of development of the various types of intelligence of children. Based on these findings, teachers should encourage parents to participate more actively in supporting the learning process at home, to provide educational materials and to organize as many educational activities with the child as possible.

Keywords: Home–school collaboration, home–school partnership, family involvement, home-based involvement, "he multiple intelligences theory, preparatory grade.

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1. Introduction

The prospects for defining the notion of "family involvement" in children's education are multiple, and the interpretations given to this concept are different (Fisher, 2009; Hill et al., 2004). The study performed by Lazer, Guttman, and Margalit (2000) reveals that students with poor school results want to get their parents actively involved in their education more than students with good school results. Also, most students prefer that their parents engage in family learning activities and would like to receive support from their mothers. Students' vision of the optimal level of parental involvement varies from one student to another. Thus, for some of the students it is more important that parents be actively involved in their education than for others (Pomerantz, Moorman, & Litwack, 2007).

In order to help parents exercise their responsibilities properly, it is necessary to develop their parenting skills through a viable and effective partnership between all the institutions responsible for children's education and well-being (Matejevic, Jovanovic, & Jovanovic, 2014). The actions of all educational partners must be guided towards providing students with an optimal educational climate and qualitative educational opportunities. School attendance, self-esteem, positive behaviours, the value they attribute to the school, the motivation for learning, as well as children's high-quality educational aspirations are significantly influenced by the degree of family involvement in children's education (Hill et al., 2004; Semke, Garbacz, Kwon, Sheridan, & Woods, 2010; Powell, Son, File & San Juan, 2010; Culp, Schadle, Robinson & Culp, 2000). Previous studies revealed that mothers are more often involved than fathers in children's education (Cankar, Deutsch, & Kolar, 2009; Taller-Azulay & Rusu, 2016). Pre-schoolers' and pupils' positive outcomes in learning are significantly influenced by the quality of parental involvement in children's education and by the quality of cooperation between school and family (Arnold, Zeljo, Doctoroff, & Ortiz, 2008; Cox, 2005; Fan & Chen, 2001; Graue, Clements, Reynolds, & Niles, 2004; Hill & Taylor, 2004; Jeynes, 2005; Porumbu, Necsoi, & Beldianu, 2013; Sheldon, 2003). Also, a high family involvement in children's education contributes to the development of the pupils' socio-emotional abilities (Nokali, Bachman, & Votruba-Drzal, 2010).

Exercise of parental attributions by only one parent may be one of the predictors of lower family involvement in children's education (Arnold, Zeljo, Doctoroff, & Ortiz, 2008). The factors that can influence the degree of family involvement in children's education are the socio-economic status of the family, the family structure, the ethnic origin of the family, parents' busy schedule, parents' educational level, the difficult life experiences, maternal depression, the distance between pupils' domicile or parents' workplace and the educational institutions, pupils' age, parents' beliefs with regard to children's education, and gender stereotypes (Arnold, Zeljo, Doctoroff, & Ortiz, 2008; Cankar, Deutsch, & Kolar, 2009; Crozier, 1999; Fantuzzo, LeBoeuf, & Rouse, 2014, Grolnick, Benjet, Kurowski, & Apostoleris, 1997; Hill & Taylor, 2004; Kohl, Lenga, & McMahon, 2000, Lamb-Parker et al., 2001; McWayne, Campos, & Owsianik, 2008; Smrekar & Cohen-Vogel, 2001). Parents with a high educational level may be more actively involved in school life and in maintaining a constant communication between school and family (Fantuzzo, Tighe, & Childs, 2000; McWayne, Campos, & Owsianik, 2008). Sheldon (2002) highlights the major influence of parents' social groups on the level of parental involvement in children's education. Cakiroglu and Kuruyer (2012) found that families with a high socio-economic status are generally more involved in children's

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education, they are willing to spend more time doing home-based educational activities, and they are interested in having close cooperation with teachers.

Catalano and Catalano (2014) highlights the fact that the implementation of certain programs able to contribute to the development of parental skills and to the increase of the degree of family involvement in children's education within the Romanian primary education system has beneficial effects on the consolidation process of the home-school partnership. Educational partnership programs should target strategies to encourage parents' early involvement in children's education (Powell, Son, File, & San Juan, 2010). School principals' openness and active involvement in the implementation process of educational partnership projects are particularly important (Van Voorhis & Sheldon, 2004).

Strategies by which teachers can contribute to the increase of parental involvement in children's education have long been studied. Parents' involvement in family-related learning activities may be associated with an increased motivation for learning, better school adaptation and a high degree of independence in solving learning tasks (Fantuzzo, McWayne, Perry, & Childs, 2004; Fishel & Ramirez, 2005; Izzo, Weissberg, Kasprow, & Fendrich, 1999; Pavalache-Ilie & Ţîrdia, 2015). The most important types of activities that are related to a high-quality family involvement in pupils' education are: overseeing children's learning activities, homework assistance, formulating high expectations, and offering various educational opportunities (Drummond & Stipek, 2004; Fan & Chen, 2001). These learning activities support the development process of students' cognitive, social and behavioural skills (Grolnick, Benjet, Kurowski & Apostoleris, 1997; Cox, 2005).

Each student has a unique intelligence profile. The theory of multiple intelligences should be used frequently in Romanian education, given the positive effects on the optimization of students' learning processes (Bocoş, 2013; Bordei, 2014; Vîrtop, 2014; Vîrtop, 2015). Previous studies indicate that there is a positive correlation between the degree of development of multiple intelligences and pupils' school results (Vîrtop, 2014; Vîrtop, 2015). The information that students have, about their own skills and multiple dominant intelligences, influences their decisions with regard to the learning activities that they intend to go through (Todor, 2014). Thus, a good knowledge of the content and applications of this theory by educators has beneficial effects on the teaching and learning processes carried out within the school (Shearer, 2004). Also, parents' understanding of the configuration of pupils' intelligence profile supports the pupils' harmonious development process (Shearer, 2013).

2. Problem Statement

Through our research, we set out to establish whether students who have recorded high or very high scores for all types of intelligences evaluated using the MIDAS for KIDS™ questionnaire benefit from higher quality and more frequent educational opportunities in the family environment. We also wanted to determine what kinds of activities parents and students perform together in order to stimulate children's multiple intelligences. Our research efforts were also aimed at pupils who had low or very low scores at the application of MIDAS questionnaire. The degree of family involvement in children's education was measured in order to determine whether a deficient involvement in children's education had negative consequences on the degree of development of multiple intelligences of the children.

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3. Research Questions

The research was guided by the following research questions:

• Is there a connection between the level of family involvement in students' education and the degree of development of all eight types of intelligence discovered by Howard Gardner?

• What are the activities that the parents of preparatory grade pupils carry out most frequently with their children in order to stimulate their multiple intelligences?

4. Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to analyse the factors that influence the degree of development of children's multiple intelligences. School activities are known to be the main context in which intelligences are continually stimulated. The premise underlying this study is that family learning situations play a significant role in the process of stimulating and developing each of the multiple intelligences discovered by Howard Gardener.

5. Research Methods

The questionnaires were filled by 227 parents or legal representatives of children from Cluj County. The study was attended only by parents of pupils enrolled in the preparatory grade during the school year 2016-2017. According to the National Education Law of Romania, the recommended age for enrolling pupils in the preparatory grade is 6 years. In order to determine whether a high level of development of the multiple intelligences of the pupils enrolled in the preparatory grade corresponds to a high level of family involvement, connections were made between the data obtained by administering the MIDAS for KIDS™: My Young Child and the Family Involvement Questionnaire to the whole sample of participants (N = 227). The MIDAS for KIDS™: My Young Child (author Branton Shearer, PhD) was used to determine the development degree of multiple intelligences for pupils in the preparatory grade. All eight multiple intelligences that make up a person's intelligence profile have been evaluated using this research tool. The questionnaires were completed by the parents or legal representatives of the students. The Family Involvement Questionnaire (author John Fantuzzo, PhD) was used to quantify the family involvement degree at home and in the school environment. The Family Involvement Questionnaire is a multidimensional scale of family involvement in early childhood education. This research tool evaluates three dimensions of family involvement in children's education: School-Based Involvement, Home-Based Involvement, and Home-School Conferencing. The agreement to translate, adapt and use these research tools has been obtained from their authors.

6. Findings

In the interpretation process of the results obtained by administering the MIDAS questionnaire, several case studies were conducted. The level of parental involvement in the education of the children who obtained high or very high scores corresponding to all multiple intelligences was compared with the level of parental involvement in the education of the children who obtained low or very low scores for each type of intelligence. It could be noticed that parents whose children have a high degree of development of the multiple intelligences have obtained significantly higher score averages, corresponding to all dimensions

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of family involvement assessed using the Family Involvement Questionnaire, than parents whose children have a low degree of development of the multiple intelligences. The results obtained suggest that there is a positive correlation between the degree of family involvement in children's education and the degree of multiple intelligences development (see figure 01). Parents whose children have a high level of multiple intelligences development have achieved higher average scores for all three dimensions of family involvement. Figure 01 shows that the highest average scores were obtained for the Home-based involvement dimension, by parents whose children have a high or very high level of multiple intelligences development After analyzing the results obtained by administering the MIDAS questionnaire, it came out that the intelligence forms for which most scores corresponding to a very high level of multiple intelligences development were recorded (scores between 80 and 100) are: naturalist intelligence, logical-mathematical intelligence and intrapersonal intelligence. Also, the intelligence types for which most scores between 0 and 20 were recorded at the level of the whole sample of participants (N = 227) are: musical intelligence, bodily-kinesthetic intelligence and spatial intelligence.

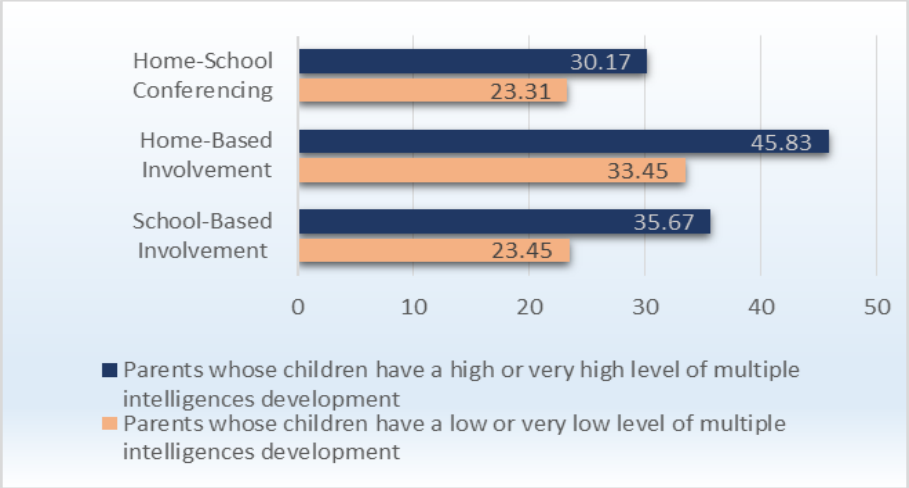

Figure 01. Average scores recorded for each family involvement dimension

Discussions with pupils and teachers have shown that the very low scores recorded by some students as to the level of multiple intelligences development are caused by various factors, including some negative characteristics of the family environment in which they develop. A very small percentage of parents, who have children included in this category, are very much involved in children's education. Discussions with teachers revealed that pupils' families in this category are in one of the following situations:

- have a large number of children;
- parents have a low or very low educational level;
- they face financial problems and have a low standard of living;
- children are in the care of their grandparents, their parents being abroad.

In the case of pupils who have recorded high or very high scores for multiple intelligence assessed using the MIDAS questionnaire, it has been found that most parents engage moderately or to a large extent in children's home-based education. Generally, mothers or grandmothers are the persons who are actively involved in children's education. Discussions with pupils, parents and teachers have shown pupils' families in this category offer them varied learning opportunities and perform educational activities such as those

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listed in table 01. In addition, these families have a good socio-economic status and parents have a high or very high educational level. In table 01 we identified types of parent-children common activities through which parents stimulate pupils' most developed multiple intelligences. These types of activities were described by the parents and pupils participating in the study as being attractive and interesting. As during the preparatory grade no homework is given by teachers, the homework has not been mentioned.

Table 01. Parent-children common activities frequently carried out in the family environment with the preparatory grade pupils

Type of intelligence	Methods by which multiple intelligences are stimulated at home
Musical intelligence	- vocal interpretation exercises / courses, use of musical instruments, and frequent musical auditions.
Bodily-kinesthetic intelligence	- sports activities, exercise, swimming or dance classes, as well as motion games;
Logical-mathematical intelligence	- counting exercises, making additions and subtractions with numbers ranging from 0 to 10, solving simple mathematical problems, engaging students in games with mathematical content, and solving worksheets available on the internet.
Spatial intelligence	-creating drawings, photographs, paintings or collages; - using puzzles or building games.
Linguistic intelligence	- reading stories or poems, games consisting of letter recognition and words reading, hyphenation of words, making sentences with given words, learning new words, and solving worksheets available on the internet.
Interpersonal intelligence	- volunteering alongside other family members or close friends, as well as activities to help people and persons in difficulty;
Intrapersonal intelligence	- long learning activities and individual games as well as self-knowledge exercises;
Naturalist intelligence	- pet walking, gardening activities, frequent trips in nature, and simple scientific experiments.

The results obtained reveal that the factors contributing to pupils' harmonious development are parents' socio-economic status, the high or very high educational level of the parents, as well as their continuous availability to carry out home-based learning activities.

7. Conclusion

We can argue that a high-quality involvement of the family members in children's education has a significant impact on the degree of development of multiple intelligences, as regards preparatory grade pupils. Each educational institution should develop action plans to increase family involvement in children's education. Teachers' initial and continuous training programs should include viable strategies to increase parental involvement and equip the teaching and leadership staff with the skills needed in order to motivate parents to become active partners in their children's education. Teachers should encourage parents to get more involved in children's education, provide suggestions and support for organizing home-based educational activities with their child. Optimizing pupils' learning process within the home environment positively influences their school evolution and the multiple intelligences development process. The teacher activity evaluation system should also reward the achievements recorded in this respect. The novelty of this

study is the highlighting of the relationship between the degree of family involvement in children's education and the degree of development of multiple intelligences for pupils in the preparatory grade.

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